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THE PURPLE MUMMY

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You know the feeling you get when you come to the Capital. It is as if you've just dropped into a new world. As helicopters transfer you from one square to another, or as you skim over the tops of huge palaces in gyroplanes that glide noiselessly along on powerful cables, or just as noiselessly descend into the underground railways streaming with bright sunlight whose source is a mystery, it, seems that everything that is striking and unique, everything that points to the future, is concentrated in this amazing and ancient city of Moscow.

I don't consider myself a hopeless yokel. In the north where I live, in the city of Leninsk, we too have got suspension cableways, helicopters and TV information centres in all the big squares. Nevertheless, when I am in Moscow I go about with a slight feeling of confusion and awe. I often wondered why, and finally came to the conclusion that it was because of the accelerated tempo. Life pulsates much faster in the capital. Even the people, who are very hospitable and warm by nature, always seem to be in a hurry. They don't stand still on the moving sidewalks, but almost run as they are carried along. They seem to be trying to keep up the traditions of their forebears who used to rush down the noisy escalators of the old Moscow Metro several decades ago, and even managed to read at the same time.

I stopped at the TV information centre on Vostania Square, which is suspended high between the two huge buildings of the Sports Palace and the Palace of Art, and dialled the address of the Museum of Material Culture, the place I was making for. The necessary co-ordinates flashed onto the screen along with directions as to how to find my way to the museum.

I was to descend to the lower park and board a winged reactor-plane which would take me to the Monument of Freedom on the Friendship of Peoples Canal. From there I was to transfer to a helicopter and land on the Blue Way . which led straight to the museum through the Agate Tunnel. The colour screen showed a thirty-storied building in the shape of a parallelepiped, inlaid with orange ceramics and a fifty-metre bas-relief in snow-white marble of the first space rocket we had launched to the moon. I set out in the direction indicated and in less than a hundred and thirty seconds had reached my destination. On the way I used my private automatic radio-telephone to inform Professor Sayen of my arrival. He met me at the museum entrance.

'Glad to see you, my young friend!' he exclaimed in his melodious voice as he welcomed me and grasped my hand in both of his. 'What brings you to this quiet corner of ours in this ever-bustling city?'

I looked attentively into the slightly mocking eyes of this scientist who was no longer young and recalled how he had looked two years ago when I was taking my post-graduate course at the Revolution University near Moscow. He hadn't changed.

'I'm afraid I have chosen an inopportune time for my visit,' I said. 'The radio news said that you are getting ready to leave for Togo...'

'Not in the least, not in the least!' the Professor protested. 'I still have thirteen hours at my disposal. I am quite sure that will be more than sufficient to clear up your problems.'

'T don't think it will require more than two or three hours of your valuable time,' I said. 'Perhaps, if you don't mind, we could begin at once...'

I had no idea how mistaken I was.

We entered a marble hall and a noiseless elevator shot us up to the museum's seventeenth floor where Professor Sayen had his office. On our way up the Professor told me something about the programme of their trip to Togo...

'We are in need of additional information on the second stage of the independence struggle of the people of that district. Many years have passed and no one has as yet gone through the archives... it's one of the weak spots in our museum,' he concluded bitterly. 'Well, I am at your disposal,' he said, seating himself on the couch.

I made myself comfortable in an arm-chair, opened my brief-case, took out a photograph of Maya, my wife, and handed it to the Professor.

'Is this face familiar to you?' I asked, watching closely to catch the slightest movement of the muscles in his tired face.

Professor Sayen took a quick glance at the photograph, puckered his brows and turned his eyes towards me in bewilderment. He seemed to be thinking hard, but shook his head. Back in Leninsk, as I was saying good-bye to my wife, she had said: 'You just watch... he'll do this...' And she had shaken her head, puckered her brows and pouted her lips, exactly as the Professor was doing at the moment.

'No, I can't say that I do,' he answered quizzically, looking at me.

He was somewhat taken aback when I nodded with satisfaction and began rummaging about in my brief-case. This time I pulled out the latest edition of the Museum's catalogue. The Professor grew impatient and moved closer to where I sat.

'Could you tell me what this is?' I asked, as I handed him the catalogue opened at the page with the inset of the portrait of the purple mummy.

It does happen that the editor-in-chief of a big publication is not always aware of everything that is printed in it. He is as human as the next man and it is quite natural that he pays more attention to material connected with his own field. His assistants answer for the rest. It is most probable that is what had happened in this case.

Professor Sayen took another look at the portrait of the mummy and turned over several pages of the catalogue to make sure of the name of the museum's new exhibit. Suddenly he exclaimed:

'Why, it's one and the same thing!'

'What is?' I asked, anticipating what was coming next.

'The picture of the purple mummy and this!' he said in wonderment.

'I knew that's how it would be,' I said, and placed the portrait of my wife next to the inset in the catalogue.

'Knew how what would be?' he queried in a puzzled voice.

'I knew that was what you would say. I had an argument with Maya. She was sure you would notice the difference at once.'

Professor Sayen's face took on a stern expression.

'I do not understand you. Whatever are you talking about?. Who is this Maya that you have mentioned?'

'I was talking of the likeness of the photograph. Maya is my wife.'

'What has your wife got to do with this?'

'The photograph is of my wife, and this,' I said, pointing to the inset, 'is a picture of the purple mummy.'

The Professor sprang up from the couch and looked me up and down. I noticed that his brows were quivering slightly.

T hope you have not travelled five thousand kilometres just for the sake of a joke?' He spoke with evident restraint.

I could see that he was finding it difficult to keep his voice in check.

'Not in the least. As a matter of fact it is this likeness that has brought me here. You are aware that I head the , Museum of Regional Studies in Leninsk. When I received this edition of your catalogue I was astounded at the likeness between my wife and the purple mummy...'

He took the catalogue out of my hands and approached the broad window. It was about noon and bright daylight streamed in through the scarcely perceptible thin glass. A helicopter flashed by, but the professor didn't take the slightest notice. He was preoccupied in making a thorough comparison of the two portraits.

I recalled Maya's words: '*He'll* say that there is a difference in the shape of the neck.'

'Why, the shape of their necks is different!' Professor Sayen cried out joyfully.

I went up to him and smiled.

'That is true. Their necks are not alike. But their faces are exact copies of each other. Just now I am interested only in the likeness. The differences may be gone into later on...'

We sat down again where we had been before. I chose the armchair and the Professor sat on the couch.

'Tell me more about what brought you here,' he requested.

I was a little nervous because the most important moment had arrived: I had to make myself as clear as possible. I pressed my lips together and my gaze wandered uneasily around the spacious study trying to find an object that would help me begin my story.

'Look at the bust of Academician Philio in the left corner behind his desk,' I recalled Maya's admonitions.

I finally located Philio's bust and began turning the pages of the catalogue. Finding the page I was looking for I showed it to the Professor.

'Look,' I said, 'do you know who this is?'

'That's Philio,' Professor Sayen answered without the slightest hesitation. 'I would like to know what you are driving at. What sort of guessing game are you playing?'

It was now my turn to show impatience. I glanced at the clock. Our short talk was certainly becoming quite a drawn-out affair. Another helicopter flashed by the window. That meant another five minutes had passed.

'Excuse me, Professor, but no doubt you do not read all the material that is published in your catalogue.'

He bunched his hands together nervously. It appeared that the idea I was trying to convey had just got through to him. Why had Philio's bust been placed in the catalogue of the Museum of Material Culture?

He gave a confused smile and passed his hand lightly over his forehead.

'You know, I never noticed that... I did see it of course, but I didn't pay any special attention to it. It concerns the department of radio-astronomic information and I suppose...'

Professor Sayen suddenly stopped talking and turned pale. He began to get up slowly from the couch, his wide-open eyes glued to my face. 'What has all this got to do with Academician Philio?' The question blazed out of his frightened eyes.

'Let me see that catalogue again,' he whispered.

With the catalogue grasped tightly in his hand he crossed the study at a diagonal, nearly banging into his desk, and came to a dead stop in front of the bust of the famous linguist.

A strained silence reigned in the room for several seconds. Then the Professor switched on the dictophone.

'I would like to see Androv in my study at once . . .'

The timbre of his voice was soft, but a slightly menacing note betrayed itself. He picked up the telephone receiver and spoke into it:

'Is that you, Aginov? Who edited Androv's stuff for the last number of our catalogue? Who checked it with the original? Are you sure? Who did the photography job? Thank you.'

The Professor had forgotten about my presence. He sat down at his desk and fell into a deep study of the portrait in the catalogue.

Suddenly he remembered me.

'Give me the portrait of that girl...' 'Which girl?'

'The one you showed me.' 'You mean Maya?'

'I don't know what her name is... Let me have it... quickly...'

'It's a photograph of my wife,' I put in determinedly. 'That is of no importance...' He cut me short. He stared at both portraits for a long time with his head between his hands.

The door opened and a tall middle-aged man dressed in a light yellow sports suit came in. He strode briskly towards the Professor's desk.

'Is this your work?' Professor Sayen asked without lifting his eyes. 'Yes.'

'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?' T don't understand what you mean...' 'You will understand in a moment. Look!' Sayen nearly threw the picture of my wife into Androv's face.

'Here is your purple . . . mummy.' Then, directing an enraged glance in my direction he said with biting irony:

'Perhaps this girl of yours...'

'My wife,' I prompted.

'... this wife of yours is really a... mummy?' Androv was staring at Maya's portrait. The Professor looked at him with scorn, contempt written in his eyes.

'In our times... to have such a thing happen... such deception... such cheating...'

It finally got home to Androv that I was directly connected with all this and he rushed up to me.

'Did you make this mirror-image of my mummy?' he demanded in a menacing voice.

I shook my head. Then, without saying a word he seized my hand and dragged me out of the study. The Professor could hardly keep up with us. Androv switched on a mobile strip of corridor, rushed off to the right and then pushed me into an elevator. We made a headlong descent, ran down another corridor, nearly bumping into the Professor who was making for the same place from another direction, and finally burst into a huge, dimly lighted hall. Quartz sarcophagi were arrayed down the centre and along the walls. We stopped in front of one.

'Look.'

I looked into the sarcophagus and quickly closed my eyes. It couldn't be. It couldn't!

'Look, look!' Androv ordered in a choking voice.

'I'm looking...' I said, faltering.

'What do you see?' the Professor asked, peering into my face.

'I see Maya,' I whispered, turning my eyes away from the plastic figure of a naked woman.

'Who the devil is Maya?' Androv demanded sharply. 'Are you trying to tell me that you know this creature?'

A deadly silence ensued. I was the first to find my voice.

'Excuse me, but that is a model of Maya, my wife...'

Androv burst into peals of laughter and shouted:

'Take a good look, perhaps you can find some special birth marks on the body of your wife!'

He put an acid stress on the words 'your wife.'

I took another look at the woman's figure lying there with wide open eyes as if she were alive... The plastic material that she was made of was purple. The most improbable thoughts were racing around in my head. I thought I was going mad.

'Everything seems to be the same except the colour of her body...'

This was followed by another burst of mocking laughter.

'Oho! So it's the colour! So she isn't quite like your wife!'

There was the same malicious stress on the words 'your wife'... I felt highly embarrassed.

I cast a pleading look in Androv's direction. These learned men from the capital often disregard the most elementary rules of etiquette and stop at nothing to prove their point.

'T really have nothing against this being here,' I said, 'although you should understand... Well, it's a good thing that you've only got a picture of the head in your catalogue, and...'

'Did you hear what I heard? Did you hear what he just said? He's got nothing against this thing being here! Do you have any idea what this thing is? My God, this is one of the greatest discoveries ever made! Four of the most powerful radio-telescopes were in continuous operation for more than a hundred hours so as not to miss the slightest signal! The information received was decoded simultaneously both in Moscow and Paris! The best machines we have were used to convolve all that information to achieve this! And you say...'

This passionate flood of words was interrupted by Professor Sayen.

'Was the head of Academician Philio also convolved in Moscow and Paris?' he interjected in a stern sharp voice.

Androv stopped short and stood frozen to the spot, his mouth open.

'What Philio?' he finally managed to get out.

This one.'

The Professor pivoted us to a quartz cowl which stood in the centre of the hall. I recognized a copy of the bust which stood in the Professor's study. This one was made of plastic material and was also purple in colour.

Androv nodded his head.

'Well, say something!' the Professor demanded.

'Yes... we used the same machines for both of them... we...'

'Who do you mean by "we"?'

'I, that is, the whole space radio-information decoding department... you know... behind the Pantheon... over there near the...'

Androv stopped short. He looked at us wild-eyed.

'You don't believe me!' he spluttered.

Professor Sayen shrugged his shoulders. For no apparent reason cold waves began to run up and down my spinal column. A horrible thought was churning around in my brain. At that moment Androv said, almost in a whisper:

'I'm telling the truth. Those two figures were convolved from coded impulse-information we received three months ago from an outlying part of the Swan constellation. We got the information on the head first... on the twenty-three centimetre band... Three months later we got the purple mummy on the same wavelength. During reception the noise did not exceed 5db... the signal-noise ratio was no more than...'

Suddenly he began to shout: 'That is impossible! What are you trying to do? Who is this Maya? Who the devil is Philio?'

The Professor handed him the photograph of my wife. He compared it to the figure lying in the sarcophagus against the wall...

'What about Philio? Is he the same man that died three months ago? Did you know him personally?'

The Professor nodded in the affirmative.

Androv jerked to a stop in the middle of the hall as if turned to stone, and then made a sudden dash for the door and disappeared.

With every second I was experiencing a growing feeling of terror. I tried to keep from looking at the transparent lid under which could be seen the purple double of my wife... The door burst open and Androv returned, accompanied by a woman carrying a small kit bag such as doctors usually lug around with them. Without a word they ran up to the sarcophagus containing the mummy and began taking off the lid.

'What do you intend to do?' Professor Sayen demanded in alarm.

'Dissect it,' Androv whispered, breathing heavily, 'and at once. If what I think is confirmed, then...'

'What are you going to dissect?'

'The mummy.'

'What for?' I shouted. I had the feeling that they were going to cut up my wife.

At that moment the woman took a scalpel and a disc-shaped electric saw out of her bag.

'I won't allow you to do this! This is valuable public property and you have no right to destroy it without getting permission from the International Science Council,' Professor Sayen stated categorically. 'Besides I do not see any sensible reason for treating this exhibit, which has been acquired from space with such difficulties, if it really has been acquired from space, in the manner you propose.'

'Don't let that bother you. Professor. All the data has been recorded on electret cylinders. She can be reconstructed any time. It would take no more than a day or two. Anthonia, get to work.'

He spread his arms wide, barring the way to the sarcophagus. I heard the whining sound of the saw as it bit into the mummy. Ice-cold waves followed each other up and down my spine.

'Now dissect the chest,' Androv commanded. 'Holy Moses, can't you saw any quicker! Are you through? Now turn back the breast-bone. Have you found the heart? Aha! Where's the liver? That's right! And the spleen. That's all. Now we can let them see it.'

Androv grabbed my shoulder.

'What are you afraid of? It's only a mummy made of plastic. Somebody's double. An exact copy. You can see for yourself how well the copy has been made...'

I approached the sarcophagus reluctantly. Parts of the dissected plastic body were spread back symmetrically from its centre and its internal structure was clearly visible. The organs were of different colours, but all with a purple tinge... The mummy's eyes were wide open and didn't express the slightest sign of suffering. It cost me a great mental effort to convince myself that this was not a live organism, but just a cleverly made copy of a human being.

'Is this a copy or isn't it?' Androv demanded as he grabbed my shoulders and shook me. His eyes shone with ill-concealed joy. 'Take a good look at it!'

I nodded my head dejectedly.

'What is your opinion, Professor?' Androv asked eagerly.

He was answered by a cry from the woman who had dissected the mummy.

'Everything is the wrong way round!'

I stared at her wide-eyed, trying to understand what she had said.

'What do you mean, Anthonia?' the Professor asked hoarsely.

'Everything! Her heart, liver, spleen... they're all the wrong way round!'

Finally I understood. The mummy's heart was on the right side and its liver on the left, as if it were a reflection in a mirror!

'Do you realize what we have achieved! This is colossal confirmation of the theory of Anti-Worlds. This is staggering news! This...'

'Will you please explain what you are talking about!' Professor Sayen demanded.

This remark reminded Androv that we were there. He walked away from the mummy, embraced the Professor, and said, solemnly:

'At last we have experimental proof that somewhere in the depths of the Universe there exists an anti-world which is •an exact copy of ours but composed of anti-matter. Such a world might be considered as an inverted image of ours.'

2

As I made my way to the Palace of Science along the swiftly moving platforms and thoroughfares of the capital, here and there above the general restrained hum and buzz of voices I could hear the words: 'Purple Mummy, Purple Mummy...'

After the International Council of scientists had made a special announcement concerning Andronov's astounding and, to say the least, bold hypotheses, it was the talk of the whole world, let alone Moscow. A new copy of the mummy was put on exhibit at the Museum of Material Culture in place of the one that had been dissected. The influx of visitors from many cities in other parts of the world became so great that several copies had to be made. They were put on exhibit in the largest public halls of the capital. By special order of the Supreme Council, the portrait of the mummy was relayed three times a day on the stereo-television colour screen. Moscow echoed with 'the Purple Mummy, the Purple Mummy.' My head buzzed with something quite different:

'Maya... Maya... Could there be, somewhere in the Universe, another woman exactly like my wife?'

I could stand it no longer. In a quiet corner of the Kremlin Park I pulled my radio-telephone out of my pocket and dialled Leninsk. A few seconds later I heard the drawn out sound of the buzzer.

'Is that you, Maya?'

'Yes. What's all this excitement about the Purple Mummy? I think I am going to invoke the law of respect for personal dignity in protest against being put on show for the whole world to see!'

This was my Maya - a very vital and effervescent little woman. A weight fell from my shoulders as I listened to her bell-like, bantering voice.

'Don't be silly. You ought to be proud of yourself!' I countered.

'I am! The press, the radio and television over here are leading me a merry dance. I have become quite a public figure. You know there was a commission here from Moscow to have me examined! They wanted to make sure that my heart was on the left side!'

'Well, what did they find?'

'Oh, it's on the left side all right! So they know I'm not from the anti-world!' She laughed merrily. 'What are you doing down there?' she asked.

'Keeping my mouth shut and trying to keep in the background. Can you imagine what would happen if they found out that I am the earth-copy husband of that purple lady?'

'They would have to dye you in that horrible colour then! By the way, why have they dyed her purple?'

'Nobody dyed her. That's the way she came out from the information machines. I suppose that's what she should be like according to the rules of the anti-world... Most people find the mummy quite attractive,' I teased.

'You can stop that. I'm in no mood for compliments! I've had enough of that up here. What are you going to do now?'

I glanced at my watch.

'In eighty seconds I am supposed to be at a conference in the Big Marble Hall of the Academy. I've got to fly.'

'Very well, dear. Good-bye. I'll follow the conference on television. Be seeing you!'

'Good-bye.'

The Marble Hall was packed and I had difficulty in finding a place. I finally found a seat at the back of the hall near the main entrance. I put on the earphones and switched on the screen on the panel of the reading stand. Academician Jonatov, the President of the Academy, made a short speech outlining the aim of the conference, 'to discuss the scientific viability of Androv's hypothesis.' A very stiff time limit was set: each speaker was allowed three minutes at the rostrum and two minutes in the section sittings. These discussions were to be held in the halls of the Academy where sound recorders had been installed, and any delegate could express his opinion and obtain copies of other delegates' speeches or reports.

Androv was scheduled as the fifth speaker. Horner, the radio-astronomist from Chicago, was the first to take the floor. He spoke on the discovery of the semantic significance of the radio signals coming to us from outer space. An equation of the information theory, which was the basis for deciphering signals of a physical nature, appeared on the screen. Horner was followed by Solvin from Moscow, who described the capabilities of the apparatuses which receive signals from the regions of Alpha Swan. Zuggan of Bulawayo spoke on the principles of recording and storing cosmic radio information.

I found the punctilious report of Suzhi, the French radio engineer, the dullest of all. He made detailed observations about ultra-sound spatial scanning of physical bodies and their reverse convolution into models of material information. He said it was based on the same principle as two-dimensional television except that convolution was accomplished with an ultra-sound 'needle', with a sound beam of several microns diameter. In conclusion he said:

'Naturally, to relay information of organisms it is necessary that they be clinically dead, at least for this method of convolution. Ultra-sound beams destroy living cells...'

These preliminary reports had been arranged so the delegates could get some idea of the quality of the experimental findings.

Androv finally took the floor.

'I have no intention of repeating known facts relating to elementary particles and antiparticles of matter. I shall just enumerate them: the electron and positron, the proton and anti-proton, the neutron and anti-neutron. The rest of the short-lived particles are of no interest to us. The experiments of Malinovsky and Sague have proved that from elementary particles it is possible to create stable anti-atoms of any element. This is sufficient to build an anti-world. But this is not what I am calling your attention to. Anti-particles are born in pairs. With a certain degree of quantum energy it is possible for atoms to be born in pairs, and, as our latest experiments have proved, paired stars can occur as well as whole planetary systems, one composed of matter and the other of its mirrored antipode - of anti-matter. The pairs that are born are physically alike with the exception of their charge and spin characteristics, as you know. The latter are unable to influence biological evolutionary processes which are conditioned by low energies and weak reciprocal action. I claim that our sun and our planets have their doubles and anti-matter which were born simultaneously from electromagnetic quanta of colossal energy. Such quanta appear from time to time in the Universe as the result of the radiation fluctuation of other stars. If this is so, then there exists an anti-Earth populated by anti-people...'

This was followed by a surge of laughter in the hall

The chairman rose and addressed Androv.

'Anti-people - anti-man - is not a nice expression. It bears an insulting implication.'

'Forgive me. I meant to say human beings composed of anti-matter.'

The laughter subsided.

Androv went on to give a detailed description of the structure of a human being made of anti-matter. He stressed the necessity of inverted symmetry in relation to the Earth structure. When he came to the Purple Mummy he became quite carried away and the chairman suggested that he dictate the rest of his report in one of the adjoining halls.

Guton, the next speaker, one of the greatest experts in anthropology, from Novosibirsk, opposed Androv's theory. By using figures he showed how often an amazing likeness could be found between people living in different parts of the Earth. In connection with the inverted situation of the internal organs of the mummy, he also indicated examples of the same phenomena observed on our planet.

Suddenly, upsetting all the rules of decorum, someone shouted from the body of the hall: 'Your probabilities have to be multiplied and will thus decrease by ten orders!'

'Why?' Guton immediately parried the interjection.

'The purple mummy is the exact likeness of an Earth habitant. Secondly, her organs have an inverted pattern. Thirdly, because the bust of a man who is the exact likeness of Philio, the linguist, has also been received from outer space. The coincidence of three extraordinarily complicated events of the same kind is hardly probable!'

Guton wrinkled his brow in thought and remained silent. A murmur of voices swept the hall.

'Go on,' the chairman prompted.

'I don't think I shall. The gentleman has proved his point...'

Guton stepped down from the platform and took his seat.

I walked out into the lobby and went up to the electrono-graph which was typing out the first reports of the conference. The speakers were nearby in sound-proof booths.

They argued, opposed, expressed their doubts or tried to refute Androv's hypotheses.

Then I went out onto the open balcony and dialled Leninsk. It was some time before Maya picked up the receiver.

'Aren't you listening in to the conference?' I asked.

'Not at the moment. I feel a bit tired. You know I think Guton is right, even though he did leave the platform. I think the likeness is just a coincidence. There are a lot of coincidences of that kind on our planet, and throughout the Universe as a whole they must be quite inevitable. Good-bye, dear. I think I had better go and lie down again...'

Maya replaced the receiver and I had no chance to tell her that I would have preferred the Purple Mummy to have been like someone else...

The worst began after the conference was over. The delegates had left for their respective cities, having come to the unanimous conclusion that the experimental data supporting Androv's hypotheses were insufficient. In a matter of hours the world lost interest in the Purple Mummy. Its doubles were removed to the basement of the museum and only the one that Androv had dissected was taken down to the Central Anatomical Theatre.

Anatomists, pathologic-anatomists, physiologists and cytologists still worked on the mummy. Before leaving for Leninsk I decided to go and see if anything new had been discovered, and bumped into Androv in the doorway of the dissecting department. He seemed to be in a state of extreme exhaustion.

I looked in through the partly open door and saw several doctors bending over the shapeless remains of the Purple Mummy.

'How are things?' I asked Androv.

'Fair. We have proved that there is no doubt about the symmetrical inverted structure of the internal organs...'

'In that case what are they doing with her now?'

Androv shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

'They are trying to discover the mummy's age from that model in order to compare it with the age of your wife.'

'It's a pity the people of the Anti-world didn't attach a sheet of paper containing her biography when they sent her over here by radio,' I joked. 'We would have managed to read the inverted reflection of the letters, I'm sure.'

'I'm sorry about something else. My opponents would have had a harder time proving their points if I had managed to receive Professor Philio's whole body and not just the head...'

I nodded in agreement.

'Your wife worked with Philio, didn't she?'

'Yes. She was his assistant. She studied the Indonesian group of languages under his guidance.'

Androv nodded his head.

'There is another way to prove that my hypothesis is right... but it all depends on them...' He nodded in the direction of the dissecting department.

'The mummy's age?'

'Yes, and several other things...'

Androv took my elbow and led me along the corridor.

'There's nothing interesting in there at the moment. Would you like me to show you how the machine works that convolves the models from the spatial scanning of the originals?'

'You bet!'

An escalator took us to the top airway where we boarded one of those noiseless cable-born gyroplanes and were transferred from one end of Moscow to the other in a few minutes. The sky was blue, cloudless and cold. The city was a mass of green and seemed to be covered with a bluish haze.

'Were you born here?' Androv asked me.

'No,' I answered.

'During the last thirty years our city has seen the most amazing changes.'

'That's true,' I agreed. 'I say, what other things besides the age of the mummy can help you to prove your theory?'

Androv hurried on, taking no heed of the interruption, as if he wished to avoid answering my question.

'I have lived here ever since I was born and the second reconstruction of Moscow took place right in front of my eyes. It all happened like in a fairy tale . . .' These giant palaces and parks seemed to spring up from nowhere. In place of the Metro we have these noiseless machines and helicopters circling over the city. The network of wires for trolley buses and trams has gone and now there are these suspension bridges over a hundred metres high, and these towers of shining metal that the gyroplane cables are attached to... Life has become so thrilling, so wonderful. Life has become so wonderful...' he repeated thoughtfully.

I wanted to repeat my question, but at that moment the gyroplane came to a stop in front of a platform.

'Well, here we are,' Androv said. 'That's our receiving centre over there.'

I looked down upon a small building with a flat roof covered with green twining ivy.

The machine that created the plastic volumetrical models on the bases of their pulsed scanning was called an electronic-acoustic repeater. It was a huge structure of shining stainless steel and blinding white enamel. Now and again a stream of warm or cooled air shot out from the cooling channels, and a hardly perceptible hum came from the machine.

Behind a glassed partition, at the end of the hall, there was another machine much smaller than the first. We went towards it.

A girl sat at the control panel reading a book. From time to time she lifted her eyes from the book and looked at the panel. A neon light in front of her went on and off at irregular moments.

'What have you got at the moment, Galya?'

'The model of a new atom reactor. From Rome,' the girl answered, rising.

'By radio or cable?'

'By radio-relayed line.'

Androv nodded and turned to me.

'Take a look and see how it's done. Here's where we receive the code information in which the co-ordinates of every point of the object being sent is ciphered - along with the colour of the material the object is made of, its constructive details, its thickness, length and so on. From the amplifier the impulses enter the decoder. After they are fed into different channels. they activate the relay which operates the mechanical and chemical parts of the machine.'

We returned to the machine in the big pavilion and approached a huge mirror-like show-case in the centre. Androv turned on the light and the interior chamber was brightly illuminated. A shapeless mass stood in the chamber with thin metal needles touching it on all sides.

'This is where the information is convolved into the model of the object. These thin air-cooled needles are something like those used for intermuscular injections. A thin stream of plastic material is pressed through them in short spurts. The needles are synchronized with the ultra-sound needles which are at this moment feeling around the real object. Drop by drop, from point to point, the thin stream of plastic builds the model. The scale of the model may be regulated by using these levers. They may be made larger or smaller than the real object...'

'What about the colour?'

'That's easy. In the initial state the material is colourless, but the photo-calorimeter, according to the colour information received, introduces the necessary amounts of the dyes indicated...'

'So this is where the Purple Mummy was born?'

Androv nodded.

'Nevertheless, I still can't understand why it is purple. If everything is as you say, it should be flesh-coloured...'

'There was a great deal of controversy on the subject at the conference. I think one of the physicists came up with the correct explanation to this puzzling phenomenon. Have you ever heard of the Doppler effect?'

'Isn't that where the length of the light wave increases if the source of radiation recedes from the observer?'

'Exactly. For example, you can recede at such a great speed that for the stationary observer the colour of your body will appear to be red. I think that the colour of the mummy indicates that the anti-world is moving in the opposite direction to our planet at a terrific speed...'

At that moment the girl called out to him from behind the glass partition:

'You are wanted on the telephone !'

Androv excused himself and I stood there watching the needles exude plastic as they produced a volumetrical reproduction of an object that was located tens of thousands of kilometres away. I tried to picture how excited the scientists must have been as they watched the needles drawing the volumetrical figure of a human body which was located at a distance exceeding all imagination.

Androv rushed up to me and seized my shoulder.

'Come on! Quick! We've got to hurry!'

'Where to?' I exclaimed with surprise.

'Back to the anatomical theatre as quickly as possible...!'

With absolutely no idea what it was all about I hurried after him. We soared up to the gyroplane line and at last came to a stop.

'What has happened?' I asked.

'When did you last speak to your wife?'

'What do you mean...?'

'When did you last speak to your wife?' he repeated, staring at me with his deep black eyes.

The gyroplane set off. Androv pulled me inside and opened the porthole. A strong gust of air blew in.

'Take out your radio-telephone and get in touch with your wife at once.'

I pulled the apparatus out of my pocket.

'Let me see it. Oh dear, it's got a ferrite antenna. That's bad... Well, try to stick it out of the porthole as far as you can and use the phone. The hull of the gyroplane is made of metal and will guard your apparatus from radio-eradiation.'

I pressed myself up against the porthole as much as I could and dialled Leninsk. My heart was beating furiously. What was it all about?

'Well?'

'There's no answer...'

'Try and stick the apparatus out a little further.'

I dialled the number again.

'There's no answer...' I said hoarsely.

'Here . . . give it to me... I'll hold it out as far as it will go and you listen.'

Androv took the radio-telephone and stuck his arm out of the porthole up to his elbow. At that moment the speed of the descending gyroplane increased sharply, something jerked, and the telephone flew out of my hand.

'Damn! Now we can't do anything!'

My apparatus had been blown away by a powerful current of air. Androv had banged his arm against the porthole and it was bleeding just below the elbow.

For a short period we stared at each other in silence. There was a look of horror in his eyes.

'What has happened to my wife?' I finally managed to squeeze out in a whisper.

'I don't know... we'll find out right away... Try and remember exactly to the day how old your wife is and exactly how much time has passed since the day of Philio's death.'

My brain was in an awful muddle... I couldn't have solved the simplest sum in arithmetic. Besides, I couldn't make out what he wanted and why. Finally I managed to blurt out:

'My wife is twenty-three years, three months and six days old... Philio died three months and three days ago...'

'Have you included the leap years?'

'No.'

'Never mind. I'll do it. Tell me the day, month and year... No, you better just tell me the date of Philio's death...'

The gyroplane came to a stop softly. Androv took hold of my had and towed me along to the exit, muttering something under his breath as we ran.

We said nothing all the way to the anatomical theatre. I couldn't remember anything. I had forgotten the date when Maya was born. I couldn't recall when Philio had died.

We were met in the lobby by a doctor who was smiling happily. He was holding a big chunk of purplish-orange plastic in his hands. Androv put his finger to his lips as a sign that he should keep quiet, but the doctor paid no heed.

'I can almost congratulate you, I can almost congratulate you!' he exclaimed.

'All that's necessary now is to find out what our Earth habitant died of! We know what the Purple Mummy died of. Look!' He handed Androv the plastic lump he was holding. 'Lymphosarcoma! A wonderful plastic model of the tumour!'

I reeled backwards in horror.

'What did you say?' Androv shouted.

'Nothing much. I certainly am surprised that on that anti-world of yours they don't know how to treat a simple thing like that. They've learned how to send the corpses of their people to us by radio, but they haven't thought of a way to treat tumours! It's a real shame.'

The doctor's face took on a scornful expression as he turned and walked towards the dissecting room in a slow and dignified manner. I had difficulty in moving my feet. My brain was in a whirl trying to imagine what could have happened to Maya. The five thousand kilometres to Leninsk took on cosmic proportions. My heart contracted with pain...

'How old was she when she died? I mean the Mummy,' Androv called out.

'Kugel will tell you. But what I can't understand is why they didn't cure that woman. Of course, sometimes neoplasm doesn't give any indication of its presence until the last moment. The only symptom is a slight feeling of tiredness, and that's all. You know what our young people are like. They wouldn't think of paying attention to a thing like that. They don't give a hoot about medical aid. And you see what comes of it...'

The doctor's voice sounded loud and harsh as if he were talking through a megaphone.

We entered the dissecting room. An elderly man who was not wearing a smock was seated at a marble-topped table making some sort of calculations in a note-book.

'Kugel, what is your estimate of how long she lived?' the doctor asked, and pointed at the mutilated plastic figure.

'Eight thousand, five hundred and twenty-three and a half days. I'm not quite sure of the half,' Kugel said, as he went on calculating.

'Doctor,' said Androv, 'this is her husband...' He gave me a light shove in the direction of the doctor.

'Whose husband? Her husband?' he asked, indicating the sawn-up bits of plastic.

'Wonderful! He can tell us the exact day when his wife died. Do you remember?'

At that moment I was thinking about something quite different. I remembered the report made at the Conference by Suzhi, the French engineer. He had said that the volumetrical convolution of an organism is possible only after death. I remembered, too, that there had been an interval of three months between the reception from outer space of the mummy and Philio's bust. Philio had died three months ago... perhaps today might be the exact day when the three months were up?

The doctor repeated his question in a honeyed tone, as if he were talking to a patient. I shook my head.

'You don't remember? You don't remember when your wife died?' The doctor sounded surprised.

I had lost the ability to speak. Androv answered for me.

'It is quite possible that she has not died. He was talking to her over the radio-telephone only two hours ago...'

'Not died? That is impossible!' the doctor stated categorically. 'I have infinite confidence in your theory of the existence of an anti-world, Androv. That is why she, that is, his wife, has to die. Otherwise we have no way of proving the existence of the anti-world and our anti-doubles out there,' he raised his eyes to the ceiling, 'in the Universe...'

I nearly choked with rage. Menacingly I went for the doctor who was carried away with enthusiasm.

'Hold your tongue! I don't give a damn about your anti-world ! She isn't dead. And if she is ill she has to be treated at once!'

Androv held me back.

'Calm down. Calm down, will you. I'll have Leninsk on the air in a minute. Come on.'

As if in a dream I walked down corridors, flew along streets, went up in elevators, listened to voices speaking...

'What was the wavelength you used to contact your wife?' I heard a voice asking.

'I don't know...'

'What is your telephone number?'

'I don't remember...'

'What is your name?'

I told them.

'Sit down here.'

Androv sat down beside me and put his hand on mine.

'They'll find her right away, don't worry...'

I nodded. A deep silence reigned in the room. A huge pendulum clock ticked in front of me. I dimly perceived a big palm tree in a wooden barrel and Lenin's bust to the-right of it on the wall. The bust was made of red marble. The clock kept on ticking - very slowly.

Then someone said:

'Go into booth number three.'

I still sat as if turned to stone. No feelings, no thoughts...

'Go into booth number three,' the voice repeated.

'Go on in. They've contacted Leninsk,' Androv said, pulling at my sleeve.

I went out. Booth number three... there it was. And there was the telephone receiver. I picked it up.

I stood there in silence.

The telephone operator said, 'Go ahead.'

'Maya,' I whispered.

'Hello, hello?' I heard her voice as clearly as if she were standing next to me in the booth.

'Maya!' I shouted, not recognizing my own voice.

'Is that you, Vadim?'

'Maya, are you alive?'

'What?'

'Are you alive?'

'Stop shouting! I can't understand a thing. Why aren't you using your radio-telephone?'

Suddenly my brain became crystal clear. I knew what had to be done.

'Maya, listen carefully,' I began, dragging the words out slowly. 'You are ill. Very ill. Do you understand? Go to the clinic at once and tell the doctor that you suspect you have lymphosarcoma. Go at once, dear. Promise me that you'll go at once!'

My wife's merry, carefree laughter rang out over the telephone.

'How very odd!' she said, finally. 'We have only lived together for four years and we think the same way even with five thousand kilometres between us.'

'Go and see a doctor at once!' I shouted.

'I am speaking to you from the Doctor's,' she shouted back.

I felt an unpleasant sensation deep down in my stomach. She went on speaking in a merry voice.

'You know, I didn't feel very well yesterday. Sort of tired and listless. I went to the clinic today and was thoroughly checked. And what do you think? When I was X-rayed the doctor discovered that the lymphatic glands somewhere near my stomach were slightly swollen. Doctor Eitrov shouted his head off at me. You should have heard him. He said, "You're an educated woman but you come for a checkup so seldom. And now, look, your lymphatic glands are two per cent larger than normal." How do you like that?'

'I like it, Maya,' I said. 'Go on...'

'Oh, everything was straightforward after that. They gave me an injection and told me to come for another one in six months' time, just to make sure that everything is in order. Isn't that interesting!'

'Very interesting,' I said.

'What are you mumbling about? What happened to the Purple Mummy?'

'She died... I mean they cut her up. All the other doubles are down in the basement.'

'What about Androv's hypothesis? Did he prove it?'

'I... I don't know. I'll tell you all about it when I get home.'

'Yes, dear. Come soon. I'm so lonely.'

'I'll be home tomorrow!'

'I'll be waiting for you. Good-bye.'

Androv was all smiles when I walked out of the booth. He threw his arms round me and hugged me to his chest.

For no reason at all I burst out laughing.

'What are you so happy about?' I asked, grinning at him. 'If Maya's lymphatic glands are slightly swollen it doesn't help you to prove your theory of anti-worlds and anti-doubles of people living on Earth.'

That's not so important. The main thing is that your wife is alive and well. I was very worried.'

'Do you really believe in the existence of an inverted copy of the Earth?' I asked, seriously.

'You believed in it, too,' he said, evasively. 'Otherwise you wouldn't have taken the Purple Mummy's fate so much to heart.'

I smiled in confusion. If you come to think of it, why had I been so afraid for Maya? My wife and the mirrored image sent on through space by radio - what could they have had in common? Nothing, of course!

'If you believe in the existence of anti-worlds, then you must go on deciphering those wonderful signals from the depths of the Universe. Carry on. Perhaps you won't find exactly what you are searching for, but whatever you find will be important...'

'I'll go on searching,' Androv said thoughtfully. 'So will all the others. But what just struck me is something the doctor who dissected the Purple Mummy said. Do you remember?'

'What was that?'

'Those people out there in the Universe know how to send volumetrical convolution signals, but they don't know how to cure lymphosarcoma...'

'So what?'

'We've got to send them information on how to cure lymphosarcoma. We've just got to. It's very important for them...'

'For whom? And where?'

'For the people who sent us the Purple Mummy by radio.'

'But it took those signals millions of light years to reach us!' I protested.
Androv wrinkled his brow and lightly brushed his head...